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ABSTRACT

In a search for the causes of student unrest, it is difficult to separate basic causes from the spoken and rationilized causes. This paper attempts to present a level of analysis which is sufficiently generic so as to discern basic trends and issues but at the same time descriptively specific, so as to be useful in facing practical issues and consequences. Some of the primary causes are: 1) dissatisfaction with the "system"; 2) the quest for identity. Among the dissenters are: 1) the frustrated advantaged youth who have been given too much; and 2) middle-class students who hope to improve things and have become frustrated in their attempts. The Informed counselors have begun to prepare their schools and students for a world of unease by: 1) listening carefully, 2) communicating the real issues; 3) being a sounding board, and 4) maintaining contact with students. When over demonstration seems imminent, a counselor can: 1) establish trust on both sides; 2) define the problem or need; and 3) cause each side to sharpen their definition of goals and objectives. Those schools which develop an internal base of security and competence so as to maintain a quality of empathy and openness to the real needs of students will probably remain open. (KJ)

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the counselor's role in student unrest

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preface

Understandable communication between individuals, groups, and nations has been a historic problem. "Student unrest" is another manifestation of this issue.

By virtue of their position, school guidance counselors are deeply involved in attempting to understand what our youth is saying and transmitting this information to other members of the faculty, the administration, and the community, as well as communicating the beliefs, principles, and responsibilities of society to young people.

As part of the continuing effort of the Department of Pupil Personnel Services to bring to guidance counselors current ideas applicable to the field, we have cooperated with Northern Illinois University in the publication of this booklet. It should be understood that the principles and ideas expressed by Dr. Schmidt are not necessarily those of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction but are worthy of consideration.

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THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE
IN STUDENT UNREST[1]

Wesley I. Schmidt

introduction

Our students can no longer be taken for granted. Student bodies that once remained mute about the ordering of their lives by the various political and educational agencies responsible for the educational enterprise, now are viable forces whose views, whether visably or accurately represented or not, are carefully considered in educational planning.

In a search for the causes of student unrest, it is difficult to separate basic causes from the spoken and rationalized causes. This paper will attempt to present a level of analysis which is sufficiently generic so as to discern basic trends and issues but at the same time descriptively specific so as to be useful in facing practical issues and consequences.

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1. During the week of August 11, 1969, Dr. Schmidt, Northern Illinois University, conducted an "on-site" non-credit workshop on student unrest for a group of suburban Chicago counselors. A number of prominent educators who have experienced unrest were interviewed at their schools to learn their views as to the causes of student unrest and the appropriate role of the pupil (or student) personnel office. This workshop was sponsored by the Department of Pupil Personnel Services, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois

primary causes

It is recognized in nearly all conversations and literature about student unrest that the school[2] is among the more vulnerable of our democratic institutions toward which to express dissent over a wide range of school related or wholly unrelated issues. However, it is also widely accepted that the school is viewed by students as being encapsulated with its own concerns and thereby alienated from students and their lives. In fact, few students perceive the school, its personnel, and organization as being devoted to their best interests. They feel that a wide difference in purpose or "raison d'etre" exists between them and the institution which is supposed to serve them.

Secondly, students are dissatisfied with the "system", that is, the bureaucratization and institutionalization of learning. They are expressing feelings about the impersonal characteristics of our bureaucratized society that the adult generation has either repressed, tolerated, or rationalized as the "necessary evil of bigness." Students are reacting, perhaps, to the concomitants of bigness—depersonalization, specialization, separation of work and play, separa-

2. School is being used here in a generic sense in order to include all public education, kindergarten through collegiate.

tion of planners from doers, rejection of creativity or innovation, lack of pleasure in the process, and arbitrary restriction of freedom in the utilization of time and space.

Lastly, our bureaucratized institutions of learning continue to place primary emphasis on the content to be learned or skills to be acquired in a society which is competing for survival, internally or externally.[3] Students do not perceive themselves to be in a struggle for survival, but rather in a struggle and search to understand their own nature, self-definition, or identity. They do not believe that the school is a useful, interested, relevant party to that quest. The adult generation, having experienced their identity quest while in pursuit of productive, survival, or achievement objectives, define the new "identity" generation as purposeless and without useful goals, and thereby, may be identified the "generation gap"—the difference in the meaning sought from experience. The younger generation asks, "Who, and why am I?" While the motive and belief of the older generation proclaims, "Let us equip ourselves for social-political-economic survival."

Other thinkers would expand the "quest or identity-search theory" further, so as to include the whole

3. Adapted from a presentation by William Glasser, M.D., July 17, 1969, at an Achievement Motivation Workshop, Stone-Brandel Center, Chicago, Illinois.

domain of human learning. Since we have raised a generation to believe that the highest virtue is to question all things within an infinite universe and since we have defined that universe as having no absolutes or external authority, it should be expected that the authority of the school should be questioned. The questioning generation has expressed its doubts in many ways, but especially with regard to the totality of control which the educational institution has traditionally exercised over all elements of human behavior. "Do these controls," they ask, "contribute to the purpose of the learning enterprise? *Or, are they traditional, restrictive, and arbitrary* impositions?"

who dissents?

It was not long ago that schoolmen were wringing their hands about the growing numbers of hoods, hippies, kooks, hangers-on, school-leavers, psychological dropouts, and school phobics. These are not the kinds of dissenters to be discussed here. The new dissenters do not display a readily identifiable norm outside of their dissent, but rather possess a psychosocial identity which can be best attached to issues, goals, and human needs. Three such groups

of dissenting students may be distinguished and identified.

One group of dissenters have their origins with the advantaged, upward-mobile, economically secure, "nouveau riche." These are not the offspring of the landed gentry or established wealth. These are the youth who have been provided all the creature comforts by parents whose lives have been successful in their upward striving, but whose children have not discovered the "why" or "how" of their parents' endeavors. The destructive, violent voice of dissent finds its greatest leadership from within this setting of frustrated youth who are not committed to objective goals or achievement, but are reacting only to their own sense of helplessness in achieving all their wants (as opposed to real needs)[4] **now**. Their frustration, and subsequent aggression, stems from a protracted adolescence and from an unending search for identity in families and communities lacking identity, from their inability to control and plan a secure future, and from the many institutionalized barriers to the communications-that-make-a-difference. Their verbalized issues come from many sources, and are often vague and obscure. Their pro-

4. This is also in keeping with Alfred Adler's analysis of the pampered child. See Hall, Calvin S. and Lindzey, Gardner, **Theories of Personality.** New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967.

test usually concerns power and control, the inhumanity of the institution, and the horror and injustice of any war. They stand ready to lash out in any direction or at any point in which the established order and society is discovered to be discordant or unethical. The most strongly frustrated, the most angry young people from this group tend to compose the more violent dissenters whose membership is found in the Students for a Democratic Society, Yippies, etc.

Another body of dissenters are arising from the solid, staid, broad middle-class culture. Inspired by the apparent enthusiasm and effectiveness of the violent students, small bands of positively inspired, sociological puritans arise to achieve some worthy, helpful, enterprise. In so doing, they suddenly discover their newly-found, human-interest enterprise to be the domain of an established profession or ongoing agency; they soon discover resistance from the threatened institutions or groups, and are forced to either retire into apathetic inaction or lash out aggressively until the established group or profession gives way.

This tragic drama is being played out weekly to the end that, "Youngsters, who get good grades and lead school activities, are suddenly rebels confront-

ing the adults who control their education. They have become members of a growing minority of high school students who are coming into focus as the 'new problem' in the nation's schoolhouse."[5]

Another group of dissenters, coming from schools and communities which offer minimal opportunities for education, employment, and mobility, have been quite direct in their appeals. The majority of high school incidents have probably been expressing the yearnings of this group. Their issues are usually real and self-evident and phrased in terms of facilities, personnel, resources, prejudice, and inequity. Although their demands are frequently unrealistic, misdirected, and aggravated by secondary concerns of gang prerogatives and feuds, or peripheral issues of the economic plight of the ghetto, the message of their plea is usually clear and justifiable — a decent school, a full and relevant curriculum, and concerned instructors.

the school and the counselor

Schools are preparing for unrest in a variety of ways, ranging from hastily prepared, repressive policies

5. Divoky, Diane, "The Way It's Going to Be — Revolt in the High Schools," **Saturday Review**, February 15, 1969, p. 83.

and defensive measures to conscientious attempts to open the lines of communication. Unfortunately, most of these preparations, even the conscientiously prepared policies toward openness, are defensive in motivation, resulting in programs and processes which are something less than genuine steps toward the Aristotelian goal of a "friendship of inequality" within the schoolhouse. In other cases, the preparations are wholly administrative and tactical, and devoid of human contact and meaning.

Informed counselors know that they are in a crucial and unique position and have begun to prepare their schools and students for a world of unease through a number of strategies:

1. Counselors have been trained to listen. If they have been listening and exploring the ethical-social issues of real life with students fully, then:

2. Counselors are aware and can communicate the real issues which the noise of unrest is expressing because their position is not one of a line responsibility to either administration or teaching faculty:

3. Counselors are safe sounding boards through which all voices of the conflict may express their needs. Furthermore, their free-wheeling staff position makes it possible for:

4. Counselors to move, cajole, assist, clear-the-air freely and creatively, without a self-preserving motive. Since the counselor's domain is the entire student body, including the majority who are concerned but at rest:

5. The counselor must maintain his contact with the main stream of student thought and provide a pillar of security for all students amid the stress of peer opinion.

and now the "bust"

Some schoolmen view every demonstration or protest as a "break" in school-community-student relations. However, many observers believe the school should make possible the forming of identity groups around social-political-school issues and seek to utilize their interest and commitment for the development of new and better goals. It is probably unreasonable for educators to expect informed, capable people to express themselves on election day only.

When overt demonstration seems imminent, and there is fear or communicative deadlock between or among leaders, the counselor's tactics may well include:

1. The establishment of **trust** on both sides.

   a. Face each group's trust of you openly as an issue. Expect a trial by fire from both sides; be a "stoolie" for no one.

   b. Be prepared to admit the fallibility of the school as an institution.

   c. Be prepared to be viewed as an enemy by teachers if you dare to listen to and understand the view of the dissenters.

   d. Accept as spokesmen whomever the demonstrators have chosen to be leaders. The student council, for example, may or may not include the leaders which the students have chosen or allowed to be their spokesmen on a particular issue.

   e. Beware of experts or the administrative resort to recognized specialists and charismatic figures. They may succeed in buying time, but probably not in resolving issues.

   f. Prepare and train the student leaders to communicate directly with professional educators about real issues.

2. Define the problem or need of the dissenting group, anonymously and in writing. You will be surprised to find little real agreement existing within dissenting groups.

3. Slowly cause each side to sharpen their definition of goals and objectives in the confrontation.

4. Arrange as many unloaded, no-audience sessions as possible for the comparison of goals.

5. Require each group to gather the self-data which the opposing group has assumed as true of the other or as a need of the other.

6. Prepare each group to contribute and/or modify maximally to achieve the originally stated goals.

7. Keep them talking and working toward the stated and accepted goals.

what of the future?

It is certain that unrest exists in each of our schools today to some degree. When and whether it will erupt into expressions of dissent, demonstrations, or violence are primarily a matter of the quality and pattern of interpersonal relationships we are establishing now. Those schools which develop an internal base of security and competence so as to maintain a quality of empathy and openness to the real needs of students will probably remain open. Those schools having hardened and fixed programs, lines of communication, and administrative posture will,

in all liklihood, find themselves cut off or closed in a variety of ways.

The effective pupil personnel office of tomorrow will expand its sphere of influence from that of personal and group counseling to that of consultant within a dynamic social institution attempting to develop relevant experiences for modern youth.

Every institution, it is said, is the long shadow of a tall man. He may be the counselor.

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